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# FRANKLIN.

A SKETCH

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JOHN BIGELOW.

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A SKETCH.

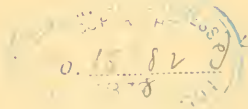
BY JOHN BIGELOW.

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## FRANKLIN.

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FRANKLIN, BENJAMIN (1706-1790), one of the most eminent journalists, diplomatists, statesmen, and philosophers of his time, was born in the city of Boston, and in the colony of Massachusetts Bay, on the 17th of January 1706. He was the youngest of ten children, and the youngest son for five consecutive generations. His father, who was born at Ecton, in Northamptonshire, England, where the family may be traced back for some four centuries, married young, and emigrated to America with three children in 1682. From his parents, who never knew any illness save that of which they died (the father at eighty and the mother at eighty-five), he inherited an excellent constitution, and a good share of those heroic mental and moral qualities by which a good constitution is preserved. In his eighth year Benjamin, who never could remember when he did not know how to read, was placed at school, his parents intending him for the church. That purpose, however, was soon abandoned, and in his tenth year he was taken from school to assist his father, who, though bred a dyer, had taken up, on his arrival in New England, the business of tallow-chandler and soap-boiler. The lad worked at this, to him, most distasteful business, until his twelfth year, when he was apprenticed to his elder brother James, then just returned from England with a new printing press and fount of type, with which he proposed to establish himself in the printing business. In 1720-21 James Franklin also started a newspaper, the second that was published in America, called *The New*

*England Courant*. Benjamin's tastes inclined him rather to intellectual than to any other kind of pleasures, and his judgment in the selection of books was excellent. At an early age he had made himself familiar with the *Pilgrim's Progress*, with Locke *On the Understanding*, and with some odd volumes of the *Spectator*, then the literary novelty of the day, which he turned to good account in forming the style which made him what he still remains, the most uniformly readable writer of English who has yet appeared on his side of the Atlantic. His success in reproducing articles he had read some days previously in the *Spectator* led him to try his hand upon an original article for his brother's paper, which he sent to him anonymously. It was accepted, and attracted some attention. The experiment was repeated until Benjamin had satisfied himself that his success was not an accident, when he threw off his disguise. He thought that his brother treated him less kindly after this disclosure; but that did not prevent James from publishing his paper in Benjamin's name, when, in consequence of some unfortunate paragraphs which appeared in its columns, he could only obtain his release from prison, to which the colonial assembly had condemned him, upon condition that he "would no longer print the *New England Courant*." The relations of the two brothers, however, gradually grew so inharmonious that Benjamin determined to quit his brother's employment and leave New England. He sold some of his books, and with the proceeds, in October 1723, he found his way to the city of Philadelphia, where, 400 miles from home, at the immature age of seventeen, without an acquaintance, and with only a few pence in his pocket, he was fortunate enough to get employment with a Jew printer named Keimer. Keimer was not a man of business, and knew very little of his trade, nor had he any very competent assistants. Franklin, who was a rapid composer, ingenious and full of resources, soon came to be recognized by the public as the master spirit of the shop, and to receive flattering attentions from prominent citizens who had had opportunities of appreciating his cleverness. Among others, Sir William Keith, the governor of the province, who may have possessed all the qualifications



for his station except every one of the few which are quite indispensable to a gentleman, took him under his patronage, and proposed to start him in business for himself, and to give him the means of going to England and purchasing the material necessary to equip a new printing office. Franklin, rather against the advice of his father, whom he revisited in Boston to consult about it, embraced the governor's proposal, took passage for London, which he paid with his own money (the governor being more ready with excuses than coin), and on reaching London in December 1724, where he had been assured he would find a draft to cover his expenses, discovered too late that he had been the dupe of Keith, and that he must rely upon his own exertions for his daily bread. He readily found employment at Palmer's, then a famous printer in Bartholomew Close, where, and afterwards at Wall's printing house, he continued to be employed until the 23d of July 1726, when he again set sail for Philadelphia in company with a Mr Dunham, whose acquaintance he had made on his voyage out, and who tempted him back by the offer of a position as clerk in a commercial business which he proposed to establish in Philadelphia. While in London Franklin had been engaged in setting up the type of a second edition of Wollaston's *Religion of Nature*. The perusal of this work led him to write and print a small edition of a pamphlet, which he entitled *A Dissertation on Liberty and Necessity, Pleasure and Pain*. Had he deferred printing it a few years, it would probably never have been heard of, for he lived to be rather ashamed of it. It procured him, however, the acquaintance of Dr Mandeville, author of the *Fable of the Bees*, whom he described as a most facetious and entertaining companion. Only a few months after Franklin's return to Philadelphia, the death of Mr Dunham put an end to his career as a merchant. While awaiting something more favourable, he was induced by large wages to return to his old employer Keimer. This led to his making the acquaintance of a young man of the name of Meredith, whom he afterwards described as a "Welsh Pennsylvanian, thirty years of age, bred to country work, honest, sensible, who had a great deal of solid observation, was something of

a reader, but given to drink." He was learning the printer's art, and offered to furnish the capital to establish a new printing office—his father being a man of some means—if Franklin would join him and direct the business. This proposal was accepted, the types were sent for, a house was rented at £20 a year, part of which was sublet to a glazier who was to board them, and before the expiration of a year from his return to Philadelphia, Franklin, for the first time in his life, was in business for himself. "We had scarce opened our letters and put our press in order," he says, "before George House, an acquaintance of mine, brought a countryman to us whom he had met in the street inquiring for a printer. All our cash was now expended in the variety of particulars we had been obliged to procure, and this countryman's five shillings, being our first-fruits, and coming so seasonably, gave us more pleasure than any crown I have since earned, and the gratitude I felt towards House has made me often more ready than perhaps I should otherwise have been to assist young beginners."

Almost simultaneously, in September 1729, he bought for a nominal price the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, a newspaper which Keimer had started nine months before to defeat a similar project of Franklin's which accidentally came to his knowledge. It had only 90 subscribers. His superior arrangement of the paper, his new type, some spirited remarks on a controversy then waging between the Massachusetts assembly and Governor Burnet (a son of the celebrated Bishop Gilbert Burnet) brought his paper into immediate notice, and his success, both as a printer and as a journalist, was from that time forth assured and complete. The influence which he was enabled to exert by his pen through his paper, and by his industry and good sense, bore abundant fruit during the next seventeen years, during which he was at the head of journalism in America. In 1731 he established the first circulating library on the continent; in 1732 he published the first of the *Poor Richard's Almanacs*, a publication which was continued for twenty-five years, and attained a marvellous popularity. The annual sale was about 10,000 copies, at that time far in excess of any other publication in the colonies, and equivalent

to a sale at the present time of not less than 300,000. In the next ten years he acquired a convenient familiarity with the French, Italian, Spanish, and Latin languages.

In 1736 Franklin was chosen a clerk of the general assembly, and was re-elected the following year. He was then elected a member of assembly, to which dignity he was re-elected for ten successive years, and was appointed one of the commissioners to treat with the Indians at Carlisle. In 1737 Colonel Spotswood, then postmaster-general, appointed him deputy postmaster at Philadelphia. About this time he organized the first police force and fire company in the colonies, and a few years later initiated the movements which resulted in the foundation of the university of Pennsylvania and of the American Philosophical Society, in the organization of a militia force, in the paving of the streets, and in the foundation of a hospital; in fact, he furnished the impulse to nearly every measure or project which contemplated the welfare and prosperity of the city in which he lived. It was during this period, and in the midst of these very miscellaneous avocations, that he made the discoveries in electricity which have secured him undisputed rank among the most eminent of natural philosophers. He was the first to demonstrate that lightning and electricity were one. The Royal Society, when an account of his experiments, which had been transmitted to a scientific friend in England, was laid before it, made sport of them, and refused to print them. Through the recommendation of his friend they were printed, however, in an extra number of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, of which the publisher ultimately sold five editions. A copy chancing to fall into the hands of Buffon, he saw their value, and advised their translation and publication in France, where they immediately attracted attention. The "Philadelphia experiments," as they were called, were performed in the presence of the royal family in Paris, and became the sensation of the period. The Royal Society of London found it necessary to reconsider its action, published a summary of the experiments in its *Transactions*, and, as Franklin afterwards averred, more than made him amends for the slight with which it had before treated him, by electing

him an honorary member, exempting him from the customary payments, and sending him for the rest of his life a copy of the *Transactions*. Since the introduction of the art of printing, it would be difficult to name any discovery which has exerted a more important influence upon the industries and habits of mankind.

In 1754 a war with France was impending, and Franklin, who by this time had become the most important man in the colony of Pennsylvania, was sent to a congress of commissioners from the different colonies, ordered by the Lords of Trade to convene at Albany, to confer with the chiefs of the Six Nations for their common defence. Franklin there submitted a plan for organizing a system of colonial defence which was adopted and reported; it provided for a president-general of all the colonies to be appointed by the crown, and a grand council to be chosen by the representatives of the people of the several colonies. The colonies so united, he thought, would be sufficiently strong to defend themselves; and there would then be no need of troops from England. Had this course been pursued, the subsequent pretence for taxing America would not have been furnished, and the bloody contest it occasioned might have been avoided. The Lords of Trade, however, feared that any such union of the colonies would reveal to them their strength; and the project of union, though accompanied with a recommendation from the governor of the province of Pennsylvania, when it was brought into the assembly, as it was during Franklin's casual absence from the hall, was rejected. This Franklin thought a mistake. "But such mistakes," he said, "are not new; history is full of the errors of states and princes. Those who govern, having much business on their hands, do not generally like to take the trouble of considering and carrying into execution new projects. The best public measures are therefore seldom adopted from previous wisdom, but forced by the occasion." Instead of allowing the colonists to unite and defend themselves, the home Government sent over General Braddock with two regiments of regular English troops, whom the colonists were expected to maintain. The proprietaries, Thomas and Richard Penn,

sons of William Penn, and the hereditary governors of the colonies, however, "with incredible meanness," instructed their deputies—the governors they sent out—to pass no act for levying the necessary taxes unless their vast estates were in the same act exempt. They even took bonds of their deputies to observe these instructions. The assembly finally, "finding the proprietaries obstinately persisted in manacling their deputies with instructions inconsistent not only with the privileges of the people but with the service of the crown,"—we are quoting the language of Franklin,— "resolved to petition the king against them," and appointed Franklin as their agent to go to England and present their petition. He arrived in London on the 27th July 1757, not this time as a poor printer's boy, but as a messenger to the most powerful sovereign in the world from a corporate body of some of his most loyal subjects.

Franklin lost no time, after reaching London, in waiting upon Lord Grenville, then president of the council, and held with him a conversation which he deemed of so much importance that he made a record of it immediately upon returning to his lodgings. Nor did he exaggerate its importance, for in it were the germs of the revolt and independence of the North American colonies. "You Americans," said Grenville, "have wrong ideas of the nature of your constitution; you contend that the king's instructions to his governors are not laws, and think yourselves at liberty to regard or disregard them at your own discretion. But those instructions are not like the pocket instructions given to a minister going abroad for regulating his conduct in some trifling point of ceremony. They are first drawn up by judges learned in the law; they are then considered, debated, and perhaps amended in council, after which they are signed by the king. They are then, so far as they relate to you, the *law of the land*, for the king is the legislature of the colonies." Franklin frankly told his lordship that this was new doctrine,—that he understood from the colonial charters that the laws of the colonies were to be made by their assemblies, approved by the king, and when once approved the king alone could neither alter nor amend them. Franklin admits that he was alarmed by this con-

versation, but he was not as much alarmed as he had reason to be, for it distinctly raised the issue between the king and a fraction of his people which was to require a seven years' war to decide. Franklin next sought an interview with the brothers Penn to lay before them the grievances of the assembly. Finding them entirely inaccessible to his reasonings, he supplied the material for an historical review of the controversy between the assembly and the proprietaries, which made an octavo volume of 500 pages. The success of Franklin's mission thus far was not encouraging, for he appealed to a class largely interested in the abuses of which he complained. Meantime, Governor Denny, who had been recently sent out to the province by the proprietaries, tired of struggling with the public opinion which was surging about him in Pennsylvania, and in disregard of his instructions, assented to the passing of laws which taxed equally the entire landed property of the province, and assumed that the assembly was the proper judge of the requirements of the people it represented. An equivalent in paper money was issued upon the faith of this tax. The proprietaries were very angry with the governor, recalled him, and threatened to prosecute him for a breach of his instructions. But they never carried their threat into execution.

The subject of "taxing all estates," after a careful discussion by counsel on both sides in London, was finally referred to a committee of the privy council for plantations, who reported adversely to the petitioners whom Franklin represented. Disappointed, but not discouraged, he suggested a compromise involving a personal engagement on his part that, among other things, the assembly should pass an act exempting from taxation the *unsurveyed* waste lands of the Penns' estate, and secure the assessment of the surveyed waste lands at the usual rate at which other property of that description was assessed. Upon this proposal, to the infinite disgust of the Penns, a favourable report was made, and approved by the king, George II., then within a few weeks of his death. "Thus," wrote Franklin, a few days later, to Lord Kames, "the cause is at length ended, and in a great degree to our satisfaction." Franklin's stipulation



gave to the Penns nothing, in fact, which they had not always had, and therefore the assembly never passed the superfluous act for securing it. They did, however, relieve Pennsylvania from the financial embarrassments that must have followed the repeal of a money bill which had already been a year in operation, and it established the principle till then denied by the proprietaries, that their estates were subject to taxation. The success of his first foreign mission, therefore, was substantial and satisfactory.

During this sojourn of five years in England, Franklin made many valuable friends outside court and political circles, among whom the names of Hume, Robertson, and Adam Smith are conspicuous. In the spring of 1759 he received the degree of doctor of laws from the Scottish university of St Andrews. He also made active use of his marvellous and unsurpassed talent for pamphleteering. He wrote for the *Annual Register*, of which young Edmund Burke was then editor, and with whom, at a later day, he was destined to have closer relations, a paper "On the Peopling of Countries," traces of which may readily be discerned in the first book of *The Wealth of Nations*. In this paper Franklin combated the popular delusion that the people and wealth of the colonies were necessarily so much population and wealth abstracted from the mother country, and he estimated that the population of the colonies, by doubling once in every twenty-five years, would, at the end of a century, give a larger English population beyond the Atlantic than in England, without at all interfering with the growth of England in either direction. Franklin's conjecture, that the population of the colonies would double every twenty-five years, commended itself to the judgment of Adam Smith, who adopted it; and it has thus far been vindicated by the census.

On the 25th of October 1760 King George II. died, and his grandson ascended the throne. A clamour for peace followed. Franklin was for a vigorous prosecution of the war then pending with France, and wrote what purported to be a chapter from an old book, which he said was written by a Spanish Jesuit to an ancient king of Spain, entitled, *On the Means of disposing the Enemy to*

*Peace.* It was ingenious and had a great effect, and, like everything Franklin wrote, is about as readable to-day as when first printed. Soon after the capture of Quebec, Franklin wrote a more elaborate paper, entitled, *The Interests of Great Britain considered with regard to her Colonies and the Acquisitions of Canada and Guadeloupe.* Its purpose was to show that, while Canada remained French, the English colonies of North America could never be safe nor peace in Europe permanent. Tradition reports that this pamphlet had great weight in determining the ministry to retain Canada, which, thanks in a large degree to his foresight and activity, is to-day one of the brightest jewels in the English crown. "I have long been of opinion," he wrote about this time to Lord Kames, "that the foundations of the future grandeur and stability of the British empire lie in America; and though, like other foundations, they are low and little now, they are nevertheless broad and strong enough to support the greatest political structure that human wisdom ever erected. I am, therefore, by no means for restoring Canada. If we keep it, all the country from the St Lawrence to the Mississippi will in another century be filled with British. Britain will become vastly more populous by the immense increase of its commerce. The Atlantic sea will be covered with your trading ships; and your naval power, thence continually increasing, will extend your influence round the whole globe and awe the world." What Englishman can read these papers to-day without a feeling of regret that Franklin was not permitted to occupy a seat in parliament as one of the representatives of the British colonies, so that England and the world might have had the advantage in a larger measure of his rare wisdom, sagacity, and patriotism?

Franklin sailed again for America in August 1762, after an absence of five years, during which he had found an opportunity of visiting large portions of the Continent, and of acquiring information about European affairs both in and out of England, which made him more than ever an enlightened and trustworthy authority in America upon all foreign questions affecting the interests of the colonists. The peace with the proprietary government was only



temporary. The question of taxing their estates had come up in a new form, and finally resulted in a petition from the assembly drawn by Franklin himself for a change of government for Pennsylvania. The election which took place in the fall of 1764 turned upon the issue raised in this petition, and the proprietary party succeeded, by a majority of 28 votes out of 4000, in depriving Franklin of the seat to which he had been chosen for fourteen successive years in the provincial assembly. The victory, however, was a barren one, for no sooner did the assembly convene than it resolved again to send Franklin as its special agent to England to take charge of their petition for a change of government, and to look after the interests of the province abroad. On the 7th of November following his defeat, he was again on his way across the Atlantic. We may as well here say at once that the petition which he brought with him for a change of government came to nothing. Franklin presented it, and the Penns opposed it; but matters of so much graver consequence continually arose between 1765, when it was presented, and 1775, when the revolution began, that it was left to the final disposition of time. The Penns at last had the sagacity to sell betimes what they were not wise enough to keep. The State of Pennsylvania gave them £130,000 for their interest in its soil, and the British Government settled upon the head of the family a pension of £4000 a year.

Early in the year of 1764 Grenville, the prime minister, had sent for the agents of the American colonies resident in London, and told them that the war with France which had just terminated had left upon England a debt of £73,000,000 sterling, and that he proposed to lay a portion of this burthen upon the shoulders of the colonists by means of a stamp duty, unless the colonists could propose some other tax equally productive and less inconvenient. He directed the agents to write to their several assemblies for instructions upon this point. The assembly of Pennsylvania, which expressed the sentiment of all the colonies, was decidedly of the opinion that to tax the colonies, which were already taxed beyond their strength, and which were surrounded by aboriginal enemies and ex-

posed to constant expenditures for defence, was cruel, but to tax them by a parliament in which they were not represented was an indignity. While such was their feeling, they allowed it to be understood that they would not reject any requisition of their king for aid, and if he would only signify his needs in the usual way, the assembly would do their utmost for him. These views were summed up in a "resolution" thus expressed: "that, as the assembly always had, so they always should think it their duty to grant aid to the crown, according to their abilities, whenever required of them in the usual manner." To prevent the introduction of such a bill as the ministry proposed, and which Franklin characterized as "the mother of mischief," he left no stone unturned, by personal intercession, by private correspondence, and through the press. At last, in despair, he, with his associate agents, sought an interview with the minister. They found him inexorable. The Government wanted the money, and it did not wish to recognize the principle upon which the colonists resisted the Government method of obtaining it. The bill was introduced, and was promptly passed, only 50 voting against it in the Commons, and the Lords not dividing upon it. The sum expected from this tax being only £100,000, it was thought the colonists would soon be reconciled to it. This was evidently Franklin's hope, which he did his utmost to realize. Writing home to a friend shortly after the passage of the Act he said, "The tide was too strong for us. We might as well have hindered the sun's setting; but since it is down, my friend, and it may be long before it rises again, let us make as good a night of it as we can. We may still light candles. Frugality and industry will go a great way towards indemnifying us. Idleness and pride tax with a heavier hand than kings and parliament." But when the news of the passage of the Stamp Act reached the colonies, and its provisions came to be scanned,<sup>1</sup> the indiscretion of those who advised it was manifest. Meetings were held in

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<sup>1</sup> One clause of the Act provided that the Americans shall have no commerce, make no exchange of property with each other, neither purchase, nor grant, nor recover debts; they shall neither marry nor

all the colonies, where resolves were passed unanimously to consume no more British manufactures until the hateful Act was repealed. For simply recommending a trusty person to collect the tax, Franklin himself was denounced, and his family in Philadelphia was in danger of being mobbed. The Act not only failed of its purpose in producing a revenue, but before it went into operation a formidable agitation for its repeal had already commenced.

The succeeding session of parliament, which began in December 1765, is specially memorable for Franklin's examination before a committee of the House on the effects of the Stamp Act ; for the magnificent parliamentary debut of Edmund Burke, whose speeches for the repeal, said Dr Johnson, "filled the town with wonder ;" and for the repeal of the offensive Act by a majority of 108. The first six weeks of this session were devoted to taking testimony at the bar of the house on American affairs, and especially upon the probable advantages and disadvantages of the Stamp Act. Franklin was the only one of the witnesses who lifted a voice that could be heard by posterity. Burke said the scene reminded him of a master examined by a parcel of schoolboys. George Whitfield, the great field preacher, wrote—"Our trusty friend, Dr Franklin, has gained immortal honour by his behaviour at the bar of the House. The answer was always found equal to the questioner. He stood unappalled, gave pleasure to his friends, and did honour to his country." The examination was first published in 1767, without the name of printer or of publisher, and the following remarks upon it appeared in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for July of that year : "From this examination of Dr Franklin the reader may form a clearer and more comprehensive idea of the state and disposition of America, of the expediency or in expediency of the measure in question, and of the character and conduct of the minister who proposed it, than from all that has been written upon the subject in newspapers and

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make their wills unless they pay such and such sums in specie for the stamps which are to give validity to the proceedings. Franklin testified under oath before a committee of parliament that such a tax would drain the Government of all their specie in a single year.

pamphlets, under the titles of essays, letters, speeches, and considerations, from the first moment of its becoming the object of public attention till now. The questions in general were put with great subtlety and judgment, and they are answered with such deep and familiar knowledge of the subject, such precision and perspicuity, such temper and yet such spirit, as do the greatest honour to Dr Franklin, and justify the general opinion of his character and abilities."

The light thrown upon colonial affairs by Franklin's examination, more probably than all other causes combined, determined parliament to repeal the bill almost as soon as it was to have gone into operation, and immediately upon the conclusion of Franklin's examination. It was to Franklin a never-to-be-forgotten triumph. He celebrated it characteristically. "As the Stamp Act," he wrote to his wife, "is at length repealed, I am willing you should have a new gown, which you may suppose I did not send sooner as I knew you would not like to be finer than your neighbours unless in a gown of your own spinning. Had the trade between the two countries totally ceased, it was a comfort to me to recollect that I had once been clothed, from head to foot, in woollen and linen of my wife's manufacture, that I never was prouder of my dress in my life, and that she and her daughter might do it again if it was necessary. I told the parliament that it was my opinion, before the old clothes of the Americans were worn out, they might have new ones of their own making. I have sent you a fine piece of Pompadour satin, 14 yards, cost 11s. a yard; a silk negligée and petticoat of brocaded lute string, for my dear Sally [his daughter]; with two dozen gloves, four bottles of lavender water, and two little reels."

The news of the repeal filled the colonists with delight, and restored Franklin to their confidence and affection. From that time until the end of his days he was, on the whole, the most popular man in America. Unhappily the repeal of the Stamp Act was a concession to the commercial interests of the mother country not to the political dogmas of the colonists. The king's party was more irritated than instructed by its defeat, and instead of surrendering any of

its pretensions to tax the colonies, almost immediately brought in a bill, which was passed, asserting the absolute supremacy of parliament over the colonies, and in the succeeding parliament another bill, which also passed, imposing duties on the paper, paints, glass, and tea imported by the colonies. This tax was resented by the colonies with no less bitterness and determination than they had resented the Stamp Act. It conveyed sterility into their recent triumph, and aroused a feeling akin to disloyalty. It made the minor differences among the colonists disappear, and crystallized public opinion with marvellous rapidity around the principle of "no taxation without representation,"—a principle which it was impossible to make acceptable to the king, whose old-fashioned notions of the royal prerogative had only been confirmed and strengthened by the irritating pertinacity of the colonists. Thus the issue was gradually made up between the mother country and its American dependencies. Each party felt that its first duty was to be firm, and that any concession would be disastrous as well as dishonourable. Such a state of feeling could terminate but in one way. It is now clear to all, as it was then clear to a few, that the passing of the tea and paper bill, made the difference between the crown and the colonists irreconcilable, and that nothing but the death of the king could prevent a war. The nine succeeding years were spent by the contending parties in struggling for position,—the colonies becoming more indifferent to the mother country, and the mother country less disposed to put up with the pretensions of her offspring. Franklin, when he went to London in 1764, confidently expected to return in the following year; but he was not destined to leave England till ten years later, and then with the depressing suspicion that the resources of diplomacy were exhausted. Meantime he remitted no effort to find some middle ground of conciliation. Equipped with the additional authority derived from commissions to act as the agent of the provinces of Massachusetts, of New Jersey, and of Georgia, and with a social influence never possessed probably by any other American representative at the English court, he would doubtless have prevented the final alienation of the colonies, if such a result,

under the circumstances, had been possible. But it was not. The colonists were Englishmen for the most part, and they could not be brought to make concessions which would have dishonoured them; and Franklin was not the man to ask of them such concessions. He took the position that "the parliament had no right to make any law whatever binding the colonies; that the king, and not the king, Lords, and Commons collectively, was their sovereign; and that the king, with *their* respective parliaments, is their only legislator." In other words, he asked only what England has since granted to all her colonies, and what, but for the fatuous obstinacy of the king, who at this time was rather an object of commiseration than of criticism, she would undoubtedly have yielded. But under the pressure of the crown, negotiation and debate seemed rather to aggravate the differences than to remove them. The solemn petitions of the colonists to the throne were treated with neglect or derision, and their agents with contumely, and Franklin was openly insulted in the House of Lords, was deprived of his office of deputy-postmaster, and was scarcely safe from personal outrage. Satisfied that his usefulness in England was at an end, he placed his agencies in the hands of Arthur Lee, an American lawyer practising at the London bar, and on the 21st of March 1775, again set sail for Philadelphia. On reaching home his last hope of maintaining the integrity of the empire was dissipated by the news which awaited him of collisions which had occurred, some two weeks previous, between the people and the royal troops at Concord and at Lexington. He found the colonies in flagrant rebellion, and himself suddenly transformed from a peacemaker into a warmaker.

The two years which followed were among the busiest of his life. The very morning of his arrival he was elected, by the assembly of Pennsylvania, a delegate to that continental congress then sitting in Philadelphia which consolidated the armies of the colonies, placed George Washington in command of them, issued the first continental currency, and assumed the responsibility of resisting the imperial government. In this congress he served on not less than ten committees. One of its first measures was to organize



a continental postal system and to make Franklin post-master-general. Thus he was avenged for his dismissal 18 months before from the office of deputy by being appointed to a place of higher rank and augmented authority. He planned an appeal for aid from the king of the French, and wrote the instructions of Silas Deane, a member of the congress, who was to convey it; he was sent as one of three commissioners to Canada, in one of the most inclement months of the year, on what proved an ineffectual mission to persuade the Canadians to join the new colonial union; he was elected a delegate from Philadelphia to the conference which met on the 18th of June 1776, and which, in the name of the people of the colonies, formally renounced all allegiance to King George, and called for an election of delegates to a convention to form a constitutional government for the United Colonies. He was also one of the committee of five which drew up what is known as the "Declaration of Independence." When about to sign it, Hancock, one of his colleagues, is reported to have said, "We must be unanimous; there must be no pulling different ways; we must all hang together." "Yes," replied Franklin, "we must hang together, or we will be pretty sure to hang separately." He was also chosen president of the convention called to frame a constitution for the State of Pennsylvania, which commenced its session on the 16th of July 1776. He was selected by congress to discuss terms of peace with Admiral Lord Howe, who had arrived in New York harbour on the 12th of July 1776, to take command of the British naval forces in American waters, and on the 26th of September, upon the receipt of encouraging news from France, he was chosen unanimously to be one of three to repair to the court of Louis XVI. and solicit his support. His colleagues were John Adams, destined to be Washington's successor in the presidency, and Arthur Lee, Franklin's successor in the agency in London.

Franklin, now in the seventieth year of his age, proceeded to collect all the money he could command, amounting to between £3000 or £4000, lent it to congress, and with two grandsons set sail in the sloop of war "Reprisal" on the 27th day of October, arriving at Nantes on the 7th of

December, and at Paris towards the end of the same month. With his usual tact and forecaste he found quarters in a house in Passy (then a suburb but now a part of the city of Paris) belonging to an active friend of the cause he represented—Le Ray de Chaumont—who held influential relations with the court, and through whom he was enabled to be in the fullest communication with the French Government without compromising it.

At the time of Franklin's arrival in Paris, he was already one of the most talked about men in the world. He was a member of every important learned society in Europe; he was a member, and one of the managers of the Royal Society, and one of eight foreign members of the Royal Academy of Sciences in Paris. Three editions of his scientific works had already appeared in Paris, and a new edition, much enlarged, had recently appeared in London. To all these advantages he added a political purpose—the dismemberment of the British empire—which was entirely congenial to every citizen of France. "Franklin's reputation," wrote Mr Adams, who, unhappily, was never able to regard his colleague's fame with entire equanimity, "was more universal than that of Leibnitz or Newton, Frederick or Voltaire, and his character more beloved and esteemed than all of them. . . . If a collection could be made of all the gazettes of Europe for the latter half of the 18th century a greater number of panegyrical paragraphs upon *le grand Franklin* would appear, it is believed, than upon any other man that ever lived."

"Franklin's appearance in the French salons, even before he began to negotiate," says the German historian Schlosser, "was an event of great importance to the whole of Europe. . . . His dress, the simplicity of his external appearance, the friendly meekness of the old man, and the apparent humility of the Quaker, procured for Freedom a mass of votaries among the court circles who used to be alarmed at its coarseness and unsophisticated truths." We may here add that such was the number of portraits, busts, and medallions of him in circulation before he left Paris that he would have been recognized from them by nearly every adult citizen in any part of the civilized world.



Writing to his daughter in the third year of his residence in Paris, of a medallion to which she had alluded, he says—"A variety of others have been made since, of different sizes; some to be set in the lids of snuff-boxes and some so small as to be worn in rings, and the numbers sold are incredible. These, with the pictures, busts, and prints (of which copies are spread everywhere) have made your father's face as well known as the moon, so that he durst not do anything that would oblige him to run away, as his phiz would discover him wherever he should venture to show it."

The story of Franklin's mission to France, as recorded in his own correspondence, is singularly interesting and romantic. In these respects it is difficult to find its parallel in the literature of diplomacy. Its results may be summed up in a few words. He became at once, as already stated, an object of greater popular interest than any other man in France,—an interest which, during his eight years' sojourn there, seemed always on the increase. Streets in numerous cities, and several societies, were named after him; the French Academy paid him its highest honours, and he conferred more distinction upon any salon he frequented than it could reciprocate. He animated French society with a boundless enthusiasm for the cause of the rebel colonists, persuaded the Government that the interests of France required her to aid them, obtained a treaty of alliance at a crisis in their fortunes in the winter of 1777, when such an alliance was decisive, and the great moral advantage of a royal frigate to convey the news of it to America. A few months later he signed the treaties which bound the two countries to mutual friendship and defence, and on the morning of the 20th March 1778 the three envoys were formally received by the king at Versailles, and through them the country they represented was first introduced into the family of independent nations.

In February of the following year General Lafayette, who had distinguished himself as a volunteer in the rebel army, returning to France on leave, brought a commission from the American congress to Dr Franklin as sole plenipotentiary of the United States to the court of France. From

this time until the close of the war it was Franklin's paramount duty to encourage the French Government to supply the colonists with money. How successfully he discharged this duty may be inferred from the following statement of the advances made by France upon his solicitation :—In 1777, 2,000,000 francs ; in 1778, 3,000,000 francs ; in 1779, 1,000,000 francs ; in 1780, 4,000,000 francs ; in 1781, 10,000,000 francs ; in 1782, 6,000,000 francs ; in all, 26,000,000 francs. To obtain these aids at a time when France was not only at war, but practically bankrupt, and in defiance of the strenuous resistance of Necker, the minister of finance, was an achievement, the credit of which, there is the best reason for believing, was mainly due to the matchless diplomacy of Franklin. Writing to the French minister in Philadelphia, December 4, 1780, the Count de Vergennes said—

“As to Dr Franklin, his conduct leaves congress nothing to desire. It is as zealous and patriotic as it is wise and circumspect, and you may affirm with assurance, on all occasions where you think proper, that the method he pursues is much more efficacious than it would be if he were to assume a tone of importunity in multiplying his demands, and above all in supporting them by menaces (an allusion to the indiscreet conduct of Franklin's colleagues), to which we should give neither credence nor value, and which would only tend to render him personally disagreeable.”

Again, February 15, 1781, Vergennes wrote :—

“If you are questioned respecting an opinion of Dr Franklin, you may without hesitation say that we esteem him as much on account of the patriotism as the wisdom of his conduct ; and it has been owing in a great part to this cause, and the confidence we put in the veracity of Dr Franklin, that we have determined to relieve the pecuniary embarrassments in which he has been placed by congress. It may be judged from this fact, which is of a personal nature, if that minister's conduct has been injurious to the interests of his country, or if any other would have had the same advantages.”

Franklin had been for some years a martyr to the gout, which, with other infirmities incident to his advanced age of seventy-five, determined him to ask congress, in 1781, to relieve him, in a letter so full of dignity and feeling, that no one can read it even now, after the lapse of nearly a century, without emotion.

"I must now," he wrote, after disposing of official topics, "beg leave to say something relating to myself—a subject with which I have not often troubled congress. I have passed my seventy-fifth year, and I find that the long and severe fit of the gout which I had the last winter had shaken me exceedingly, and I am yet far from having recovered the bodily strength I before enjoyed. I do not know that my mental faculties are impaired,—perhaps I shall be the last to discover that,—but I am sensible of great diminution of my activity, a quality I think particularly necessary in your minister at this court. I am afraid, therefore, that your affairs may some time or other suffer by my deficiency. I find also that the business is too heavy for me and too confining. The constant attendance at home, which is necessary for receiving and accepting your bills of exchange (a matter foreign to my ministerial functions), to answer letters, and perform other parts of my employment, prevents my taking the air and exercise which my annual journeys formerly used to afford me, and which contributed much to the preservation of my health. There are many other little personal attentions which the infirmities of age render necessary to an old man's comfort, even in some degree to the continuance of his existence, and with which business often interferes.

"I have been engaged in public affairs, and enjoyed public confidence in some shape or other during the long term of fifty years, and honour sufficient to satisfy any reasonable ambition; and I have no other left but that of repose, which I hope the congress will grant me by sending some person to supply my place. At the same time I beg they may be assured that it is not any the least doubt of their success in the glorious cause, nor any disgust received in their service, that induces me to decline it, but purely and simply the reasons I have mentioned. And as I cannot at present undergo the fatigues of a sea voyage (the last having been almost too much for me), and would not again expose myself to the hazard of capture and imprisonment in this time of war, I propose to remain here at least till the peace—perhaps it may be for the remainder of my life—and if any knowledge or experience I have acquired here may be thought of use to my successor, I shall freely communicate it and assist him with any influence I may be supposed to have, or counsel that may be desired of me."

Congress not only declined to receive his resignation, but with its refusal sent him a commission, jointly with John Adams and John Jay, who had been the agent of the congress in Spain, to negotiate a peace. Cornwallis had surrendered at Yorktown on the 17th of October of that year, the anniversary of Burgoyne's disastrous surrender at Saratoga just four years before, and a farther prosecution of the war beyond what might be necessary to secure the most favourable terms of peace was no longer advocated by

any party in England. Active negotiations with Franklin and his associates were opened, and on the 30th of November a preliminary treaty was signed by the English and American commissioners ; a definitive treaty was signed on the 30th of September 1783, and ratified by congress January 14, 1784, and by the English Government on the 9th of April following. At the conclusion of the preliminary treaty Franklin renewed his application to congress to be relieved, to which he received no answer. A few weeks after signing the definitive treaty, he renewed it again, but it was not until the 7th of March 1785 that congress adopted the resolution which permitted "The Honourable Benjamin Franklin to return to America as soon as convenient," and three days later it appointed Thomas Jefferson to succeed him.

During his stay in Paris Franklin gave by no means all his time to political problems. He wrote a paper for the Royal Society on the subject of balloons, a topic which, under the auspices of the Montgolfiers, attracted a great deal of attention at that time in France. Sir Joseph Banks commended it for its completeness. To some one who asked the use of the new invention Franklin replied by asking, "What is the use of a new-born baby?" In 1784 he was appointed by the French Academy one of a commission ordered by the king to investigate the phenomena of "mesmerism"; and to a large extent he directed the investigation which resulted in the disgrace and flight of Mesmer and his final disappearance from the public eye. Franklin's *Information to those who would Remove to America*, his *New Treatise on Privateering*, his *Essay on Raising the Wages in Europe by the American Revolution*, his *Letter to Vaughan on Luxury*, his *Story of the Whistle*, together with his private as well as official correspondence, kept the world constantly talking about him and wondering at the inexhaustible variety and unconventional novelty of his resources. "You replace Dr Franklin," I hear, said the Count de Vergennes to Jefferson when they first met. "I succeed, no one can replace him," was Jefferson's reply.

It was on the 12th of July 1785 that, accompanied by some members of his family and most intimate friends, he

set out for Havre on his return to America. In view of his infirmities, the queen had placed one of her litters at his disposal; the next day he was constrained by a most pressing invitation to accept the hospitality of Cardinal de la Rochefoucauld at Gaillon. At Rouen, he was waited upon by a deputation of the Academy of that city. At Portsmouth, where the party joined the vessel that was to take them home, the bishop of St Asaph's, "the good bishop," as Franklin used to style him, an old friend and correspondent, came down with his family to see him, and remained with him for the two or three days before they sailed.

On the 13th of September Franklin, who had become by far the most widely known and the most eminent of Americans, disembarked again at the very wharf in Philadelphia on which, sixty-two years before, he had landed a houseless, homeless, friendless, and substantially penniless runaway apprentice of seventeen. The day succeeding his arrival, the assembly of Pennsylvania voted him a congratulatory address; the public bodies very generally waited upon him, and General Washington, by letter, asked to join in the public gratulations upon his safe return to America, and upon the many eminent services he had rendered. Sensible as his countrymen were of the magnitude of their obligations to him, and of his increasing infirmities, it never seems to have occurred to them that they could dispense with his services. In the month succeeding his arrival he was chosen a member of the municipal council of Philadelphia, of which he was also unanimously elected chairman. He was soon after elected by the executive council and assembly president of Pennsylvania, by seventy-six out of the seventy-seven votes cast. "I have not firmness enough," he wrote to an old friend, "to resist the unanimous desire of my country folks, and I find myself harnessed again to their service another year. They engrossed the prime of my life. They have eaten my flesh, and seem resolved now to pick my bones."

At the expiration of his term in 1786, he was unanimously re-elected, and again unanimously in 1787. He was also chosen a member of the national convention, of which Washington was a member and president, which met on

the second Monday of May 1787, to frame a constitution for the new confederacy. To the joint influence of Franklin and Washington probably should be ascribed the final adoption of the constitution which this convention framed, and which continues to be the fundamental law of the United States. The most original, if not the most ingenious, and perhaps, in view of the grave difficulties it disposed of, the most important feature of the constitution they constructed—that which gave the States equal representation in the upper house or senate and in the lower house representation according to population—was the device of Franklin. For his three years' service as president of Pennsylvania Franklin refused to accept any compensation beyond a reimbursement of the postage he had paid on official letters, amounting to some £77, 5s. 6d., it being one of his notions, which he advocated in the convention, that the chief magistrates of a nation should serve without pecuniary compensation. Franklin survived his retirement from office two years, which he consecrated almost as exclusively to the public use as any other two of his life, although most of the time the victim of excruciating pain. His pen was never more actively nor more effectively employed. He helped to organize and was president of the first society formed on the American continent or anywhere else, we believe, for the abolition of slavery, and as its president wrote and signed the first remonstrance against slavery addressed to the American congress.

( Franklin died in his own house, in Philadelphia, on the 17th of April 1790, and in the eighty-fifth year of his age. Since then, as in life, his fame has gone on increasing. No American has ever received such varied and extensive homage from his countrymen. There is no State in the United States, and there are few counties that have not a town called Franklin (Ohio has nineteen of them); scarce a town that does not boast of its Franklin Street, or its Franklin Square, or its Franklin hotel, or its Franklin bank, or its Franklin insurance company, and so on; his bust or portrait is everywhere; and some sort of a monument of Franklin is among the attractions of almost every large city.)



When Franklin, the fugitive apprentice boy, in 1723, walked up Market Street on the morning of his first arrival in Philadelphia, munching the rolls in which he had invested a portion of the last dollar he had in the world, the curious spectacle he presented did not escape the attention of Miss Read, a comely girl of eighteen years who chanced to be standing in the door of her father's house when he passed. Not long after, accident gave him an introduction to her; they fell in love, and, soon after his return from his trip to England, he married her. By her he had two children, a son who died young, whom Franklin spoke of as the finest child he ever saw, and a daughter, Sally, who married Richard Bache, of Yorkshire, England. Mrs Bache had eight children, from whom are descended all that are now known to inherit any of the blood of Benjamin Franklin. Before his marriage Franklin had a son whom he named William, who acted as his secretary during his first official residence in England, and who, as a compliment to the father, was made governor of the province of New Jersey. When the rebellion broke out, William adhered to the mother country, which exposed him to serious indignities and was a source of profound mortification to his father. Next to the loss of his only legitimate son, this was perhaps the greatest sorrow of Franklin's life.

"You conceived, you say," wrote Franklin to him nine years after the rupture, "that your duty to your king and regard for your country required this. I ought not to blame you for differing in sentiments with me on public affairs. We are men all subject to errors. Our opinions are not in our own power. They are formed and governed much by circumstances that are often as inexplicable as they are irresistible. Your situation was such that few would have censured your remaining neuter, though there are natural duties which precede political ones, and cannot be extinguished by them."

Without presuming to extenuate anything that was unfilial in Governor Franklin's conduct, we cannot help remarking that Franklin, with a blindness common to parents, quite overlooked the fact that his son, when he determined to adhere to the sovereign whom he had sworn loyally to serve, was a lusty lad of forty-five years.

In his will the father left William his lands in Nova

Scotia, and forgave him the debts due to him. "The part he acted against me in the late war," continued the will, "which is of public notoriety, will account for my leaving him no more of an estate he endeavoured to deprive me of." Governor Franklin had a son who also was not born in wedlock, named William Temple Franklin. He was brought up by his grandfather and served him in the capacity of private secretary during most of his residence in France, and after his return to the United States. Franklin tried repeatedly but unsuccessfully to have the young man appointed to some subordinate mission. He had been brought up in France, his education was strangely deficient, and he does not seem to have left an altogether favourable impression upon his countrymen abroad or at home after his return. It would not be strange if they judged him more correctly than his grandfather did. To this grandson Franklin bequeathed most of his books and all his manuscripts and papers, from which he published the first edition of the writings of his grandfather, purporting to be complete, in 1816, and after a delay never satisfactorily explained and apparently inexcusable. A criticism of this publication, attributed to Jeffrey, appeared in the *Edinburgh Review*, No. 56, August 1817.

Though spending more than half of his life in the public service, Franklin was never for a moment dependent upon the Government for his livelihood. With the aid of his newspaper, his frugality, and his foresight, he was enabled to command every comfort and luxury he desired through his long life, and to leave to his descendants a fortune neither too large nor too small for his fame, and valued at the time of his death at about £30,000 sterling. Though rendering to his country as a diplomatist and statesman, and to the world as a philosopher, incalculable services, he never sought nor received from either of these sources any pecuniary advantage. Wherever he lived he was the inevitable centre of a system of influences always important and constantly enlarging; and dying, he perpetuated it by an autobiography which to this day not only remains one of the most widely read and readable books in our language, but has had the distinction of en-



riching the literature of nearly every other. No man has ever lived whose life has been more universally studied by his countrymen or is more familiar to them.

Though his pen seemed never idle, the longest production attributed to his pen was his autobiography, of less than 300 8vo pages, and yet, whatever subject occupied his pen, he never left the impression of incompleteness. He was never tedious, and an inexhaustible humour, a classic simplicity, an exquisite grace, and uniform good sense and taste informed and gave permanent interest to everything he wrote. Franklin was not an orator, but when he spoke, as he did occasionally in the several deliberative bodies of which he was a member, his word, though brief, was, like his writings, always clear, judicious, felicitous, and potential. No man ever possessed in a greater degree the gift of putting an argument into an anecdote.

His country owes much to him for his service in various public capacities; the world owes much to the fruits of his pen; but his greatest contribution to the welfare of mankind, probably, was what he did by his example and life to dignify manual labour. While Diderot was teaching the dignity of labour in France and the folly of social standards that proscribed it, Franklin was illustrating it in America, and proving by his own most conclusive example that

“ Honour and fame from no condition rise.”

There are few born into this world so ill-conditioned that they cannot find comfort and encouragement from some portion of the life of Franklin; none of any station who may not meditate on it with advantage. That feature of it which is most valuable will probably be found most difficult to imitate. It is stated by himself in the following extract from his diary in 1784:—

“ *Tuesday 27th.*—Lord Fitzmaurice called to see me, his father having requested that I should give him such instructive hints as might be useful to him. I occasionally mentioned the old story of Demosthenes’s answer to one who demanded what was the first point of oratory? *Action*; the second? *Action*; the third? *Action*,—which I said had been generally understood to mean the action of an orator with his hands in speaking, but that I thought another kind of ‘action’ of more importance to an orator who would persuade

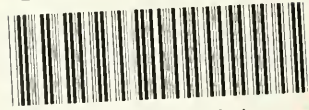
people to follow his advice, viz.,—such a course of action in the conduct of life as would impress them with an opinion of his integrity as well as of his understanding; that this opinion once established, all the difficulties, delays, and oppositions usually occasioned by doubts and suspicions were prevented; and such a man, though a very imperfect speaker, would almost always carry his points against the most flourishing orator who had not the character of sincerity. To express my sense of the importance of a good private character in public affairs more strongly, I said the advantage of having it, and the disadvantage of not having it, were so great that I even believe if George III. had had a bad private character and John Wilkes a good one, the latter might have turned the former out of his kingdom.”

Though Franklin was far from being insensible to what are termed worldly considerations, his public life was singularly free from any vulgar or degrading trace of self-seeking; he never is found making the public interests secondary to his own; though holding office a good portion of his life, he never treated office holding as a profession, nor the public treasury as the accumulations of the many for the good of a few. His private affairs and the public business were never allowed to become entangled or to depend the one upon the other. Though, from the nature of his various employments, a target for every form of malevolence and detraction during the last half of his life, his word was never impeached, nor his good faith and fairness, even to his enemies, successfully questioned. Of some irregularities in his youth he early repented, and for the benefit of mankind made a public confession, and all the reparation that was possible.

The most complete edition of Franklin's works is that of Jared Sparks, in 10 vols. 8vo, Boston, 1836-40. An edition of the autobiography, revised by John Bigelow, from original MSS., appeared in 1868, and again in 1875, 3 vols. Parton's *Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin*, 2 vols., was published at New York in 1864.



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